CHARACTER THROUGH A CAUSE [1]

I Corinthians ix, 25—"Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things."

THERE is something very human in St. Paul's comments upon the athletic games which he witnessed at Corinth. The fact that he went to see them at all is interesting. It is one of many evidences that he was no recluse. He was ever mingling with all sorts of people, in the market place, in the theatre, in jails, in barracks, on shipboard, in governors' palaces, in temples, in synagogues, and in private homes. His letters contain many allusions to the races and games of the Greek stadium. Perhaps he was drawn there by the peculiar fascination which great physical power and prowess have for a man who is weak and sickly. A kind of wistful pathos comes with the thought of the Apostle to the Gentiles witnessing the athletic sports of the Greek youth. Himself probably small of stature, never robust, troubled by some persistent malady which he calls "a thorn in the flesh," he presents a contrast to the lithe, swift runners in the races. The contrast cuts into his consciousness. He stands enthralled by their strength and endurance, sharing for the moment the tense interest of the gay throng of spectators. He is Greek enough by education to appreciate the enthusiasm of the people, but he is also Hebrew enough to have an after-thought about the gorgeous spectacle. He knows the long training of the athletes, their

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rigorous temperance in food and drink, their self-denying devotion and their patriotic, religious fervor in the games. But the Hebrew nature in him is moved with astonishment that there could be so much preparation and so much popular zeal in contests like these. And they do it all, he exclaims to himself, for a corruptible crown,—a crown of fading leaves! The memory of that scene remains vivid in his thought. Years afterward, doubtless having witnessed similar games in many cities, his astonishment still haunts him and he writes about it to his little band of Corinthian Christians and rebukes them by reminding them that their own athletes are restrained and temperate in order to compete for a small reward, and they themselves as Christians should be far better in their moral life because their goal is so much greater. For that fading crown men discipline themselves in all manner of self-restraint. "Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things."

But there are greater crowns which cannot fade. Surely, for these, men will be still more devoted. How easily we share this mixed feeling when we stand in the stadium of a great institution of learning to-day. Eagerness and loyalty fill the hearts of thousands to see their teams struggle for a pennant. We know they have trained hard. They have had to forego much. They have practiced real self-denial. Their days and their nights have been kept for this hour. They have been temperate, industrious, unselfish, and clean for the chance of transient and uncertain glory. It is at once a thrilling and a puzzling sight.

Sitting up in the bleachers some little student, to whom nature has not given a physique for a scrimmage like that, finds himself swept along by the spirit of the hour. He knows intimately the players on his side. At the practice games he has cheered them on. His own handicap of small

stature or ill health has magnified appreciation of his big, robust fellow students. He knows what they have paid, what they have sacrificed, how they have worked. And still the issue is uncertain. Someone must fail. But it is magnificent. It is wonderful that men will go through so much and perhaps have only defeat in the end. The more he reflects the more perplexed and querulous he becomes. He asks himself whether life itself may not be like that. Is it everywhere subject to the fortunes of inheritance, or of some element of luck? Are there no fields of action where all who enter may win just rewards—rewards which endure? Does not the deeper life of the school itself offer more substantial trophies in which all may share if they strive for the mastery? Will not life out in the world be available for more participants than are athletic contests, and more generous in prizes which have permanent worth?

The Christian religion answers that question by holding up before us the ideal of service to our fellow man. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Whatever enterprise is guided and tempered by this motive is lifted out of the sphere of mere competition and transformed into what is meant by a Cause. It is therefore in the very nature of a Cause to offer genuine victory to all who will engage in it, and its crown will not fade. St. Paul was the apostle of that ideal. The glory and the fascination of it grew upon him as he went from city to city of the ancient world and beheld the futility and sadness of men who were throwing their magnificent energies into the struggle to obtain selfish and transient goals. The ideal of the fine young athletes of the stadium furnished him a popular and convincing illustration to set over against the ideal of his new religion. In the pursuit of his ideal all could win success, a success which

would endure, a crown which could not fade, and which was therefore worthy of the utmost self-control and devotion.

Many students of our civilization believe this age sorely needs the same challenge which was given to the rich, luxurious, and dissolute city of ancient Corinth. Here are splendid men and women concentrating great ability, in some cases, upon ephemeral and superficial ends. A few weeks ago I had a conversation with a dog doctor in my city. He told me of a talented, wealthy young woman who was specializing in Chow dogs. She is the owner of twenty-six of these aristocratic canines. She recently built kennels for them which cost twenty-six thousand dollars. That is six thousand dollars more than the initial gift which the founder of my Alma Mater gave to establish an institution for the higher education of thousands of human beings. No right-minded person objects to a reasonable consideration for these wonderful dumb friends of man, but it is not difficult to forecast the destiny of a people which cares more for its dogs than for its men. Many other examples of what Mr. Veblen calls "conspicuous waste" confront us, and the cure for such a condition lies in helping every individual to find a "Cause" through which to build up his own character and to help along the world.

There are many Causes in our society and they all have a common factor, the love of our fellow human beings. The only thing necessary to transform any useful pursuit into a Cause is to fill it with the milk of human kindness. There are numerous social movements appealing to us by every post which are obviously and inevitably of this character. The Red Cross, the Near East Relief, the Bureau of Charities, Public Education, Hospitals, Missionary Societies, Eugenics Societies, Associations for the Advancement of Science, Art Clubs, are a few of them. But it is not

necessary to wait for some organized philanthropy to make its appeal. A man's business may become a Cause. Whenever a merchant says to himself, "business is business," and means by it that business is nothing more than business, there is something lacking. But when he perceives that his trade should be promoted with consideration for human values as well as for financial profit, then his business becomes a Cause. This does not mean that a successful business can be conducted as a charity, but it does mean paying reasonable wages, observing the laws of fair dealing, using no adulterated goods, recognizing the claims of community interests in the territory covered, and paying an honest tax. An economist has lately pointed out that the development of big business in this country has already reached what might be called a moral crisis by a process of depersonalization. Under the impulse of specialization in production and distribution, backed by highly capitalized corporations, a marvelous accumulation of power and skill is centered upon commercial transactions. The demand upon the buyers of a company is to purchase in the lowest markets of the world, and upon the salesmen to distribute products in the greatest possible quantity and at the best prices anywhere over the earth. The old checks and incentives of face-to-face trade and barter, of friendly and neighborly feeling between customer and merchant have all but disappeared from the dominant commercial transactions of our time. We are accustomed to think of business less in terms of individuals and persons, and far more as the system, the corporation, the organization, the machine. On that account business is in danger of losing its soul, its human touch, its social conscience, its idealistic "good will." Without this quality it becomes a sharp game which men may play for higher and higher stakes, with tremendous energy

and cleverness, but finally with a sense of weariness and disillusionment. The crown of riches for which they have been so disciplined and strenuous through their youth begins to fade and lose its charm. Some compensation is gained for men like Andrew Carnegie by establishing libraries and benevolent foundations, but there is a growing conviction that a better way might be found to make industry and commerce serve this larger social ideal in the experience of employers, employees, and the public, in their own lifetime and through the natural processes of manufacture and exchange.

It is interest in the human values of a task which makes it a Cause. Physical culture and athletics may be given genuine religious significance, as the Young Men's Christian Association has proved. There is a striking illustration of this in the life of Alonzo Stagg, who is known to all college athletes of the past thirty years. But they do not all realize that Mr. Stagg was a student for the ministry at Yale in 1892 when President Harper persuaded him to join his faculty as director of physical culture and athletics. It is doubtful whether the ministry could have offered Mr. Stagg so great an opportunity for impressing the youth of this country with high ideals of healthy manhood and clean, square sportsmanship. He has understood that the main business of a university is to afford training for the mind and the will, and not to entertain students or the public with exciting contests, but he has also known that a man's recreation and physical development are quite as essential to his intellectual and spiritual growth as are study and high ambition.

Such devotion to a Cause is the surest way to be of real use in this world and to develop a character of the highest order. We have counted too much on good intentions and

pious wishes; on pangs of conscience and subjective repentance. He that would save his life must give it to a good Cause. When you know what a man is interested in, what he works at when he is alone, what he spends money for, what he turns to in his leisure, then you know what kind of man he is. If you see his thought and his effort going into social enterprises, then you know something good about his soul and something about his soul's salvation. In proportion as he works at any objective social task through which he seeks to advance human life, his own nature is broadened and enriched, disciplined and strengthened. Religion has often made a puzzle and a mystery of the spiritual life when it is in reality profoundly simple. By their fruits ye shall know them. The character of a farmer is revealed in his fields, of an architect in his houses, of an engineer in his bridges, of a father in his children, of a player in his game. The doer is blessed, or cursed, in his deed. The deed reacts upon the doer. He may see himself in it as in a mirror. Whenever he improves his work he also improves himself, and the surest and sanest way to correct his faults is by striving to get better objective results. The good tennis player, or golfer, keeps his eye on the ball, not on himself. The man who sees a good Cause advancing by his effort knows that in so far his character is wholesome and sound.

There are two ways in which a Cause determines our character. It liberates and it disciplines us. St. Paul was carried out into the wide spaces of the world by his Cause. From a provincial, sectarian station, he was led out into Asia and Greece and finally to Rome. From a narrow and restricted social outlook, he became the interpreter of a faith for all mankind, for Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female. He gained from his mission courage to

rise above his diffidence to overcome a depressing sense of personal inferiority, and to face perils by land and by sea, in the city and in the wilderness and among false brethren. His stammering tongue became eloquent, and his wavering spirit attained poise until he exclaimed, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

Professor Josiah Royce, addressing the graduate students of the University of Chicago on the human side of their work, said facetiously that the subtitle of his talk might be called, How to be a cultivated person though a university student. What he stressed was that in our age of specialization, we are in danger of failing to appreciate the social motivation of our separate sciences and their relation to the life of mankind. This difficulty might be largely overcome, he thought, if students would acquaint themselves with the biographies of the eminent men in their fields. Surely the mathematician, reading of Sir William Hamilton's discovery of quaternions, or the physicist following the personal life of Helmholtz, discovers a rich human setting for the achievements of these scientists.

The biography of Alice Freeman Palmer, by her distinguished husband, is a charming history from our own time of the enlargement and refinement of a person born in obscurity and poverty, who was lifted into a foremost place of leadership and influence by devotion to a Cause. She was the granddaughter of a country doctor. "In sympathetic relations with him," the record runs, "she learned to love humankind in all degrees of trouble and poverty." That attitude came to full consciousness during her first year after graduation from the University of Michigan. She was teaching in a seminary for girls among whom she soon gained remarkable influence. Her experience is described in one of her letters as follows: "As I lived among

these young people day after day, I felt a want of something,—an absence of the sunshine which melts its own way. Looking on and into them, I said, I will try to be a friend to them all, and put all that is truest and sweetest, sunniest and strongest that I can gather into their lives. Whenever they want help or comfort, my door shall be open. We ought to love everybody and make everybody love us. Then everything else is easy." At twenty-four she was made professor of history, and at twenty-six became President of Wellesley College. Her fame and her influence continued to increase and her character deepened and expanded as she gave herself untiringly to the service of many people and institutions. Her own growth as an incident of her outgoing love for others is illustrated by her reply to a young woman who asked for advice as to how tact might be acquired. She replied that a teacher of her girlhood had told her about the importance of tact and had said that a good way to gain it was to care more about the person we are dealing with, and the end we seek, than about gaining that end by our special means. As she threw herself into the organization and administration of Wellesley, her own nature reflected her achievements. A close friend in those strenuous days afterwards wrote of her, "The evolution of the new Wellesley had drawn lines over the round, mobile face, lines of character, of strength, lines to be welcomed, for they stood for development and growth. She was changed and Wellesley was changed."

Sometimes we are warned about the crushing power of a Cause over the individual, as if a man had to surrender his personality and dwarf his soul in order to work with other people and for great unselfish ideals. It is the interesting problem of the uniform. The postman and the soldier, the member of a labor union and the citizen of a state

recognize the claims of their loyalties, but they also experience a certain sense of power and expansion of self-feeling which the isolated individual does not know. Every useful organization presents its members with opportunity for a widening acquaintance, for participation in collective power, and for a share in the responsibility of office and leadership quite beyond the reach of unattached and un-uniformed men. The mind and will are thereby stirred to greater problems and to larger loyalties than are possible to a single life within itself. It has been one of the great appeals of Christianity that it has set before men a challenging task of the greatest magnitude, and has offered them the warmest and most intimate fellowship in devotion to its Cause. How often have we seen men of good average ability touched by the call of great fields of service in the missionary enterprises of the church. And then their work abroad in learning a new language, understanding new customs, cultivating sympathy for different philosophies of life, and everywhere feeling the common hunger and sorrow of the world has given them vision and faith and resourcefulness beyond the measure of their fellows who have remained within narrower and less idealistic occupations. They have become pioneers of new cultures, scholars of new tongues, and happy heroes of new warfares.

But a great Cause also brings discipline. They who strive for the mastery are temperate in all things. In sports a man submits himself to rigorous training as a matter of course. He gives up tobacco and rich foods and late hours; he puts in days of tiring practice; he denies himself to his friends; and concentrates everything upon his goal; but he does not complain of hardship or self-denial or self-sacrifice. A man in the pursuit of a profession does not limit his work to an eight-hour day. The lawyer getting up his brief, the

physician attending his patients, the teacher preparing for his classes, or the scholar engaged in research is compelled to forego many things which otherwise he might greatly enjoy. He will beggar himself to buy books, he will risk his health to gain time, he will wrestle in anxious thought to solve his problem. But he does not feel the need of pity. His heart is in his work, and like an artist who loves his art, a good workman rejoices in his calling. It is only the man who spends his time in idle leisure or in vain amusement who actually sacrifices himself. The people who pamper themselves, who undertake no fruitful or unselfish labor are the ones who most need pity, for they miss the true pleasures and the deeper joys of life.

It is a tragedy that the advocates of Christian living so seldom emphasize this fact. Too often they do not give themselves to a religious way of life whole-heartedly and with understanding. Therefore they miss its joy. They talk plaintively of serving Christ, as if they were driven to His service by fear or at poor wages. They do not share the joy which He felt. They have not caught the glad note of His benediction to His followers when He said to them, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Failure to realize the enthusiasm and buoyancy and joyousness of Jesus and of His religion is one of the most pathetic facts in the history of His church. It keeps people away from Him and from His Cause. In other things men are earnest, and devoted, abstemious and faithful without being depressed and full of self-pity. Why, then, should they be gloomy or unattractive in their religion unless they have misunderstood it or failed to enter into its spirit? At Corinth the Christians whom St. Paul addressed had neither joy nor the strenuous virtues. Later ages have often had the

hard goodness without gladness, and it is one of the demands of our time to find the qualities of noble character through free and happy devotion to the Christian ideal of service to our human world. There is less excuse now, either for the sadness of Christians or for their lack of praiseworthy character because the society in which we live affords better opportunities and incentives to pursue concrete, social ends and in so doing to gain the moral qualities which spring from them. In that ancient time there seemed little hope of creating a Christian social order in this world. Government, wealth, learning, and the arts were scarcely found among the early Christians. Too often persecution and death were their portion. They were driven to despair of realizing the kingdom of God upon earth and therefore developed the habit of looking to a future life and of living as much as possible apart from the present world. But to-day, in the western nations, Christianity is no longer persecuted but is nominally the prevailing religion. Kings and presidents, prime ministers and members of parliaments, captains of industry and masses of people are professed Christians. The popular ideals of democracy and right living are influenced by the teachings of Christianity. Social reforms, neighborhood centres, movements for world peace, and many applications of the natural sciences and of the social sciences to improving human life offer unprecedented opportunities for the Christian man to find a Cause congenial to his spirit. On every hand it is proclaimed that the old distinction between the secular and the sacred has been overcome, and all useful occupations made potential Causes within the great inclusive Cause of Christian service. This means that a teacher or an artist can be religious in the pursuit of his life work and that any formal religious activities in which he may engage have no different or superior worth. So also

domestic life, rough labor, mechanical arts, political life, and our recreations may be prosecuted on the high level of genuine Causes. Accordingly, religion is beginning to make a far wider and deeper appeal. In one of the most popular textbooks in the subject of ethics it is asserted that the final value of every social institution, whether in the state, or in business, or in religion, is its educational value in the broadest sense. That is, the test of all our enterprises is their contribution to the development of the men engaged in them. At last nothing counts but the Causes whose support enlarges and nobly disciplines the characters of human beings. As Edwin Markham has said:

> We all are blind until we see
> That in the human plan
> Nothing is worth the making if
> It does not make the man.
>
> Why build these cities glorious
> If man unbuilded goes?
> In vain we build the world, unless
> The builder also grows.

There is one thing necessary to facilitate the extension of this Christian view of life, and that is to give it our loyal, intelligent, and enthusiastic support. Our college athletics have practically the undivided endorsement of the entire college community and of the newspapers and the public at large. Therefore young men are stimulated to their greatest possible exertion to win the games and establish new records. They accept readily the exacting conditions of athletic training and foster the moral qualities of restraint and temperance which they impose. They are not looked upon as martyrs but as heroes. More than anything else it is this organized and powerful public favor which nerves

the sportsman to his effort. Social approval is the mightiest force to encourage and control human conduct. Few, if any, individuals have ever been able to stand against it. Therefore, the spectators, in large measure, determine the direction and the energy of our aspirations. Exceptional men, like the Apostle Paul, may gather about them in imagination a company of the elect whose sustaining presence is sufficient support for the utmost moral crises, but men generally answer more directly to the faces they see present in the flesh, and to the shouts ringing in their ears. Therefore, it is not enough to have a minister here and there declare that the Christian's Cause, the Cause of humanity, is the greatest in the world and that his crown is worthy of the utmost moral heroism. It is necessary to have this conviction wrought into a vital and commanding social consciousness. Business men must acknowledge it as the ultimate law of business, scientists recognize it as the basic fact of all moral order, statesmen apprehend it as one with justice and liberty, artists find in it the supreme beauty, and all lovers feel it as their own fulfillment. Then men will make this Cause of Christ their own and strive for its realization, not counting the cost, or the perils, or the sufferings, but rejoicing with joy unspeakable.

The moral philosophers have made us familiar with what they call "the hedonistic paradox." They mean the paradox that in order to attain pleasure it is necessary to seek something else. Actually people only find happiness by finding friends, or solutions for problems, or success in practical tasks. There is a similar paradox in religion, namely, that in order to develop character, it is necessary to develop something else. We must forget ourselves, our own dear souls, and launch out boldly into the great quest for truth,

for a better social order, for a nobler and a happier world. In striving for mastery in the Christlike manner of whole-hearted devotion to a worthy Cause we shall be most certain to find ourselves sharing in a Christlike character.

EDWARD SCRIBNER AMES.